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SUBJECT: PKK TERROR VIOLENCE CAUSES HIGH ANXIETY

REF: ADANA 0104

1. (SBU) Summary: Representatives of non-governmental organizations in southeastern Turkey recently told DPO that the region's human rights situation has been steadily improving over the past five years. Human rights workers' anxiety is increasing, however, with every new clash between PKK/Kongra-Gel terrorists and government security forces. While contacts are not ready to say that the government's "old measures" for combating the PKK are coming back, even the most optimistic observers fear that in the coming months, the public will be caught in the middle of overzealous security forces and a terror group that has proved its ruthlessness. Many interlocutors claim that public support for the PKK terrorists is low, even among rank and file members of the pro-Kurdish DEHAP party, but that despite anti-violence dialogue within the Kurdish community, fear of PKK reprisals prevents public criticism for now. Meanwhile, a government official in Diyarbakir stated that he understood undertaking anti-PKK actions in Iraq would put the U.S. in a difficult spot, but it is "impossible to explain that to a large segment of the population," he said. End Summary.

PKK Violence Causes Anxiety

2 (SU "A month ago," said one Diyarbakir lawyer, "I would have stressed the positive more than the negative in discussing reforms and implementation." But with the PKK/Kongra-Gel's abandonment of its ceasefire, contacts in southeast Turkey assert, anyone who takes a stand against anything now will now be labeled PKK, and the security forces will use the attacks as a pretext to crack down. While not ready to say yet that all the "old measures" are coming back, clearly anxiety is rising among generally hopeful observers in southeast Turkey. Diyarbakir lawyers stated that many people have difficulty accessing lawyers for suspected PKK members. In the case of terror-related suspects, the Bar responds by approaching the Security Director. They report being routinely told that the suspect in question has not requested a lawyer, but officials produce no signed document to that effect from the suspect. Later, in court, claim the Bar members, suspects indicate that they had wanted a lawyer.

No One Wants the Violence to Return

3. (SBU) "This violence is affecting us all now," said one Diyarbakir lawyer, as attacks are no longer limited to rural areas. He had recently planned a trip to Tunceli to get away but cancelled it after hearing there was a security operation being conducted in the area. "I was thinking of my kids," he said, and he didn't want them to be exposed to checkpoints. Contacts insist that no one wants the violence back. Villagers are put in the worst no-win situation, contacts say: first they will be extorted by the PKK and if they refuse, they'll be beaten; then the army will accuse them of aiding and abetting the terrorists, they say.

4. (SBU) A private businessman agreed that sympathy for the PKK among the population had decreased. He recently had visited a previously pro-PKK village to pay his respects to the family of an elderly person who had passed away. During the visit, he tentatively brought up his anger about the PKK's abandonment of its ceasefire, expecting an argument. The villagers agreed openly, he said, and were more vigorous in their disapproval than he was. Dialogue about the need to speak out against violence is happening, even among DEHAP members, according to contacts, but people feel it is too dangerous to go public. A member of the Tunceli Bar said that "even sympathizers in circles close to the organization [PKK] say this is not to their benefit and will damage them." He claims that rank and file members of human rights NGOs and DEHAP, for example, are moderate even if their leaders appear "rigid." It is impossible to show a reaction to the violence, though, as the PKK would show its "counter-reaction," he said.

5. (SBU) One Tunceli businessman opined that the politicians (referring to DEHAP) had to move first on publicly denouncing violence. Another in Diyarbakir apparently agreed, saying that he had visited Diyarbakir's Mayor Baydemir recently to express his disapproval of the mayor's recent condolence visit to the

family of a suspected PKK militant. Businessmen in Diyarbakir had been putting together an anti-violence statement recently, he added, but scrapped it when the Governor called them in and asked them to do it. In the wake of that request they decided timing wasn't right and the statement would not be perceived as authentic.

Deputy Governor: Attacks not "serious"

16. (SBU) Unlike NGO contacts, the Deputy Governor of Diyarbakir was skeptical that the renewed violence would have any impact. The situation is different now, he said. Five hundred militants at a time could enter previously, and the PKK used to receive more support from Europe and the drug trade. Today, he said, the U.S. is in Iraq and understands security differently, and overall support for the PKK is down (Note: He did not provide detailed information to back up that assertion. End note). Only small groups are coming in and staging ambushes and harassment attacks to cause problems, he said. Before, the PKK killed "50 people at a time," he said, adding that the current activity did not represent "serious" attacks. Timing of Ceasefire Abandonment "Very Strange"

17. (SBU) With the slow but steady progress acknowledged by so many human rights activists in the Southeast, and demands for additional progress flowing reasonably well through democratic dialogue and courtrooms, why the PKK would decide to abandon its ceasefire at this time baffled all interlocutors. The timing is "very strange and meaningless," they said, unless there is truth to conspiracy theories about forces from both sides conspiring to spoil Turkey's chances for EU accession. This argument posits that in addition to dampening the EU's enthusiasm for giving a date, a return to chaos and violence in the region materially benefits no small number of people. As a brief example, one contact said, certain individuals gain from having jandarma checkpoints in place: if you have a restaurant or even sell gum by a checkpoint, it adds up to income. This is just one small example, he said, compared to the organized crime activity that can flourish when freedom of movement is restricted for security reasons. The violence of past years had largely ended because the PKK had given up terrorism, claimed one lawyer. He added that when Abdullah Ocalan said to resume the "war", it was resumed, and he wondered whether or not Ocalan could get messages out of prison if they were not "approved" by the state. "I'm not a conspiracy type, but this is too strange," he said.

Impact on Public Opinion about the U.S.

18. (SBU) According to non-governmental contacts, the recent increase in violence in the region is not having an effect on public opinion about the U.S. in southeast Turkey. "Any thinking person knows that this violence does not benefit the United States," said one Diyarbakir lawyer. He claimed that Abdullah Ocalan and the Turkish media are trying to foment the idea that the U.S. supports the recent up-tick in violence. Another human rights activists averred that most in Turkey's Kurdish community understand that the "Kurdish issue" can't be solved the same way in Turkey as it may be in Iraq. "In Turkey this must be solved in framework of democracy, and we expect you to push Turkey in this direction," he said.

19. (SBU) The Deputy Governor of Diyarbakir had a slightly different take. He diplomatically recalled that there has been great support in Turkey for the United States since 1945, and that our support especially vis-a-vis the Soviet Union pre-1980 was especially appreciated. However four to five thousand PKK militants are nested in Iraq, he said, and they'll take actions according to U.S. posture. There are U.S. armed forces 100 kilometers from Turkey's border, he continued, and though Turkey sees the resistance U.S. troops are facing, and understands that anti-PKK operations would put the U.S. in a difficult position, "it is impossible to explain that to a large segment of the population, so the PKK must be taken under control."

110. (SBU) Comment: Some of the reforms enacted during the EU harmonization process in Turkey have taken hold, and will be difficult to turn back under any circumstances. Others, however, are more fragile and will be tested as the GOT implements its response to violent attacks by PKK terrorists. The Diyarbakir Bar's assertion that some terror suspects are being denied immediate access to a lawyer, for example, are worrying. Human rights activists are watching security forces' response to PKK violence carefully, and will vociferously denounce actions perceived as disproportionate to the threat. It is, however, uncertain that southeast Turkey's Kurdish population would overcome the traditional barriers to public voicing of criticisms of PKK terror.

111. (U) BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.